

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 ISO-00 ACDA-05 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07

L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-10

SAM-01 /082 W

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O 161410Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5418

INFO AMEMBASSY MADRID IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 2354

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR PFOR MO SS SP MR

SUBJECT: SPANISH SAHARA DEVELOPMENTS: TENSION INCREASES

1. SUMMARY. MOROCCAN NEWS AGENCY HAS REPORTED CAPTURE OF SPANISH TROOPS AND FIRING OF ROCKETS AT SPANISH HELICOPTERS IN SAME WAY AS BBC. SPANISH EMBASSY BELIEVES MOROCCAN ARMY FIRED ROCKETS BUT DENIES CAPTURED TROOPS BEING HELD IN MOROCCO. NO MENTION MADE OF 25,000 MOROCCAN TROOPS BEING MASSED ON SAHARA FRONTIER AND SPANISH EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE MOROCCAN ARMY UNITS IN REGION HAVE MOVED OUT OF GARRISONS TO IMMEDIATE FRONTIER AREA. KING CONVOKED SPANISH AMBASSADOR TO MAKE FIRM PRESENTATION OF MOROCCAN POSITION AND AMBASSADOR APPARENTLY PROTESTED CAPTURE OF TROOPS. WHILE ELEMENT OF THEATER INVOLVED IN LATEST DEVELOPMENTS, TENSION CLEARLY RISING AND CHANCE OF
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REALLY SERIOUS INCIDENT HAS GROWN. END SUMMARY.

2. SEMI-OFFICIAL MOROCCAN NEWS AGENCY (MAP) HAS REPORTED MAY 15 ANNOUNCEMENT BY SAHARA GOVERNOR GENERAL GOMEZ ON SAHARA CLASHES IN MORE OR LESS SAME WAY AS BBC MONITORED LOCALLY. ACCORDING TO GOMEZ, TEN SPANIARDS (2 LIEUTENANTS, 4 NCO'S AND 4 ORDINARY SOLDIERS) WERE DISARMED BY SAHRAOUI TROOPS UNDER THEIR COMMAND AND ARE NOW PRISONERS OF PRO-MOROCCAN LIBERATION FOR UNITY FRONT (FLU) IN MOROCCO. SPANISH ARMY, GOMEZ WENT ON, IS IN PROCESS OF DISARMING OTHER SAHRAOUI TROOPS IN ORDER TO PREVENT SIMILAR INCIDENTS. GOMEZ ADDED THAT SPANISH AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN OPERATING WITHIN 2 KILOMETERS OF MOROCCAN FRONTIER SINCE WEEKEND LOOKING FOR MISSING SOLDIERS, AND ON WEDNESDAY, GOMEZ SAID, MOROCCAN FIRED ROCKETS AT THESE AIRCRAFT. MAURITANIANS HAVE PROTESTED SPANISH VIOLATIONS OF THEIR AIR SPACE, ACCORDING TO GOMEZ.

3. MAP DID NOT REPEAT BBC REPORT THAT 25,000 MOROCCAN TROOPS HAD BEEN SENT TO SAHARA FRONTIER. SPANISH EMBASSY TELLS US THAT IT POSSIBLE TO ARRIVE AT 25,000 FIGURE FOR MOROCCAN "TROOPS" IN REGIONMDF VARIOUS PARA-MILITARY FORCES INCLUDED. EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT MOROCCAN ARMY UNITS IN REGION HAVE MOVED OUT FROM THEIR GARRISONS TO IMMEDIATE FRONTIER AREA.

4. SPANISH EMBASSY COMMENTED TO US ON OTHER ASPECTS OF GENERAL GOMEZ'S STATEMENT. SPANISH AIRCRAFT AT WHICH TWO ROCKETS FIRED WERE TWO CHINOOK HELICOPTERS WHICH WERE HOVERING ON NORMAL RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS CLOSE TO MOROCCAN-SAHARAN FRONTIER. MOROCCAN MILITARY UNITS ALMOST CERTAINLY FIRED ROCKETS, IN SPANISH EMBASSY'S VIEW. SPANISH HERE ADD THAT HELICOPTERS WERE NOT, AS GENERAL GOMEZ REPORTED TO HAVE SAID, SEARCHING FOR CAPTURED SPANISH TROOPS WHO WERE IN TWO PATROLS OPERATING NEAR MAURITANIAN/ALGERIAN AREA OF SAHARA FRONTIER AND WHO SPANISH SAY ARE NOT BEING HELD IN MOROCCO. FLU, EMBASSY SAYS, IS LED BY MOROCCAN OFFICERS BUT WAS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR CAPTURE OF SPANISH TROOPS.

5. FRAGMENTARY NEWS ACCOUNTS INDICATING POSSIBLE CAPTURE OF SPANISH SOLDIERS BEGAN APPEARING IN PRESS HERE MAY 13, BUT INCIDENT NOT ATTRIBUTED SPECIFICALLY TO FLU. THE 2 OR 3 DAYS FOLLOWING THE INCIDENT WITNESSED INTENSE DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY.
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ON MAY 13, KING CONVOKED SPANISH AMBASSADOR TO MAKE WHAT FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCE HAS CHARACTERIZED TO US AS FIRM PRESENTATION OF MOROCCAN POSITION ON SANDRA ISSUE. SPANISH AMBASSADOR APPARENTLY USED OCCASION TO PROTEST CAPTURE OF SOLDIERS. MOROCCAN AMBASSADOR TO MADRID WAS HERE DURING WEEK AND ALSO SAW KING MAY 13.

6. IN THE HAGUE, EACH "INTERESTED" PARTY HAS NOW MADE

PRESENTATION. LOCAL PRESS ACCOUNTS GIVE NO INDICATION AS TO WHEN COURT WILL DECIDE ON MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN REQUESTS THAT TWO AD HOC JUDGES BE APPOINTED AS COUNTERWEIGHT TO SPANISH JURIST WHO IS PERMANENT MEMBER OF TRIBUNAL. YDPRESS HERE RECRN

N MAY 14 ALGERIAN PRESENTATION BEFORE COURT IN FAVORABLE LIGHT, NOTING REPEATED ASSERTION THAT GOA HAS NO TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS IN COLONY. HOWEVER, FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCE CITED ABOVE TELLS US ALGERIAN PRESENTATION WAS CONTENTIOUS FROM MOROCCAN POINT OF VIEW.

7. PRESS COVERAGE OF UN MISSION SOJOURN IN SAHARA HAS BEEN LIMITED. SEMIOFFICIAL REPORT NOTES ACTIVITIES OF "WHITE MEN DRESSED AS SAHRAOUI" WHO ARE INCITING CROWDS TO DEMAND INDEPENDENCE. ISTIQLAL JOURNALIST, WHO IS IN CANARY ISLANDS AWAITING GOS PERMISSION TO ENTER SAHARA, CLAIMS THAT EL AYIUN RADIO HAS URGED PRO-INDEPENDENCE FRONT FOR LIBERATION SAKIET EL-HAMRA AND RIO DE ORO (F POLISARIO) TO COOPERATE WITH SAHARA NATIONAL UNION PARTY (PUNS) IN BRINGING INDEPENDENCE TO COLONY. JOURNALIST NOTES ALGERIAN BACKING OF F POLISARIO AND CALLS PUNS A CREATURE OF SPANISH AUTHORITIES.

8. FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCE HAS CONFIRMED THAT ISTIQLAL SECYGEN BOUCETTA'S TRIP TO MADRID DID NOTHING TO ESTABLISH DIALOGUE ON SAHARA. BOUCETTA FOUND SPANISH INTRANSIGENT, QURCE SAID.

9. COMMENT: WHILE THERE CLEARLY ELEMENT OF THEATER IN LATEST SAHARA DEVELOPMENTS, POSSIBILITY THAT THINGS COULD GET OUT OF HAND GROWING STRONGER. REPORT THAT ROCKET FIRE DIRECTED AT SPANISH AIRCRAFT INDICATES THAT MOROCCAN ARMY INVOLVING ITSELF MORE DIRECTLY IN PROCEEDINGS THAN BEFORE. AS DATT HAS REPORTED, FIGURE OF 25,000 MOROCCAN TROOPS
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ON SAHARA FRONTIER IS PROBABLY SOMEWHAT HIGH, AND WE HAVE NO CEDICATION THAT THESE FORCES HAVE BEEN MOVED TO FRONTIER FROM THEIR GARRISONS IN REGION. NEVERTHELESS, AS EACH SIDE STRIVES TO OUTDO OTHER FOR BENEFIT OF UN MISSION, CHANCES OF REALLY SERIOUS INCIDENT OCCURRING MOUNT.
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